

STATEMENT OF DR. DONALD R. TRILLING, ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY
FOR POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION,
BEFORE THE HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON AGING, OCTOBER 24, 1979

Introduction

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Donald Trilling. I am Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and International Affairs, Department of Transportation. I am accompanied by Robert McMannus of the Urban Mass Transportation Administration and Ira Laster of Policy and International Affairs, Department of Transportation.

I am pleased to appear before you this afternoon to discuss the Department of Transportation's activities to improve transportation services for the elderly, as well as the Department's efforts to support the coordination of Federal programs in cooperation with the Administration on Aging.

Public Transportation is especially important to our nations elderly. Many elderly people on a fixed income cannot afford to purchase or operate an automobile. Others are prevented from using private transportation because of physical handicaps or the inability to purchase liability insurance. For many reasons, therefore, the elderly are forced to depend upon public transportation as their only access to services which are vital to their well-being and existence. It is imperative that we assist the elderly in satisfying their basic needs for food, clothing, recreation, and medical attention.

Interagency Working Agreement

In an effort to foster consultation and cooperation for effective public transport, the Department and the Administration on Aging have signed three working agreements setting forth specific actions which the two agencies have now undertaken to improve transportation services for the elderly. A 1975 agreement is entitled "Statement of Understanding Among the Administration on Aging, Department of Transportation and Office of Education on the Use of Schoolbuses for Older Persons." This agreement calls for these three agencies to work together in the exploration of methods to increase mobility of older persons through the use of schoolbuses. The Program devotes special attention to those older persons in rural areas.

The Administration on Aging has addressed this issue in previous research and the Department of Transportation is now supporting a study of the use of school buses for transporting elderly, nonwheelchair handicapped persons during non-peak hours. The study is examining some of the problems inherent in the utilization of school buses for non pupil transportation. The study hopes to make recommendations or propose solutions where appropriate. A part of the study's final report will constitute a user's manual for local and state planners who wish to use school buses for other than pupil transportation. We anticipate that the final report will be available early in the spring of 1980.

A second agreement, signed in 1975, sets forth the following three objectives:

(1) continued implementation of grant programs under the Urban Mass Transportation Administration which could improve specialized transportation systems; (2) continued implementation of the Rural Highway Public Transportation Program in a manner that could contribute to the improvement of the mobility of rural elderly persons; and (3) joint research, demonstration and technical assistance activities to promote efficient and effective provision of transportation services to older persons.

With respect to the first objective regarding grants, a special capital assistance program administered by UMTA made approximately \$26 million available during fiscal year 1979 under Section 16(b)(2) of the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, as amended. This program awarded grants to private nonprofit organizations to assist in the acquisition of capital equipment for use in providing transportation services to elderly and handicapped persons. Of the \$26 million that was available, UMTA awarded grants totalling nearly \$25.6 million to organizations in 40 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Regarding the second objective, the rural highway program, the Department has developed guidelines pursuant to Section 147 of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973. These guidelines indicate that services for the elderly and handicapped will be one of the criteria used in the evaluation of applications for grant funds under that program. Approximately 98 percent of the projects funded under that program identified elderly persons as direct beneficiaries of the proposed services.

In response to the third objective, regarding research, demonstration and technical service, the Department, AOA and the Rehabilitation Services Administration of HEW sponsored three regional workshops, which were held in Boston, Kansas City, and San Francisco. The primary objective of the workshops was to encourage further cooperation between agencies providing services to elderly and handicapped persons and local public transportation operators. The workshops focused on the general area of coordination in the provision of transportation services for older persons and those that are handicapped, and provided a forum for agency personnel at all levels to explore the potential for expanded coordinations.

Under a third interagency agreement on information and referral services for the elderly signed in 1975 by AOA, DOT and several other federal agencies, the Department indicated that it would provide referral agencies with information about financial and technical resources which may be available for improving transportation service to the elderly. The Department handles written and phone requests for information about DOT programs designed to improve transportation for elderly and handicapped persons.

In addition to these agreements, the Department also supports other programs which directly benefit the elderly.

DOT Programs Which Benefit Elderly Citizens

Operating Assistance

Many programs focus on the operation of existing transportation systems. These programs provide financial assistance to mass transit and improve the transportation services available to our nation's elderly. For example, those transit agencies which receive operating assistance funds through the Department's Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) under Section 5 of the UMT Act, may not charge elderly or handicapped patrons during off peak hours more than one-half of the regular fare. This provision reduces the cost of public transportation to elderly and handicapped persons who are able to schedule travel during off peak hours when the facilities are other wise less congested.

The provision of 80% Federal aid grants to transit agencies under Section 3 of the Act helps fund transit construction and improvement and enables operators to purchase new equipment.

Section 18 of the Act provides capital and operating revenue for non-urbanized area public transportation programs. Seventy-five million was initially appropriated and twelve million was spent in the first year of this program, which will also benefit the elderly.

Planning Assistance

Planning grants provided by the UMTA under section 9 of the Act are used to support planning activities at the local level. This insures that the services provided are responsive to the needs of potential patrons. Such grants help identify the special requirements of user groups, such as the elderly, thereby making it possible for these special needs to be considered in the development of service strategies.

Research

The Department supports research to assist transit agencies in selecting the best equipment and facilities for the provision of public transportation services, and in the development of marketing strategies for maintaining existing ridership, and acquiring new ridership. The Department supports hardware research to develop safer, more comfortable and efficient vehicles and related facilities, and it supports other research to define better the characteristics of existing and potential riders. This research also helps to determine some of unique travel need of the elderly.

Demonstrations

Demonstrations supported by the Department are designed to identify marketing strategies which are best suited to the special requirements of elderly and handicapped persons.

For example, in areas where transportation services appear to be available in ample supply, user-side subsidies are sometimes provided to reduce the per trip cost to a level which elderly and handicapped can afford.

The Department is examining the service of a "transportation broker" as a means of matching transportation needs with available services. This concept has potential for increasing the efficiency of existing equipment and facilities thereby reducing the cost of transportation services for the elderly and the handicapped.

Regulation

The Department's regulation implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, prohibits discrimination against the handicapped in federally assisted programs. This will significantly benefit those elderly persons who are also disabled. This regulation requires that federally assisted programs under the Department of Transportation operate within a three to thirty year time span. I am pleased to submit a copy of this regulation for the record.

This concludes my testimony. My colleagues and I will be happy to respond to any questions which the Committee may wish to ask.

